

RFK-JOHNSON SPLIT CHISELED THROUGH YEARS OF DOUBT

By CARL P. LEUBSDORF  
 WASHINGTON (AP) — When President Johnson removed Robert F. Kennedy from consideration for vice president in 1964, Kennedy pledged to devote himself to "the programs and ideals" of John F. Kennedy which he said Johnson "is carrying on."

WITHIN A YEAR, however, Robert Kennedy began to reveal in public his doubts Johnson was holding to this course. The doubts have grown and Kennedy has become increasingly critical of the Johnson administration's foreign and domestic course. Throughout these nearly four years however, Kennedy has in-

sisted he supports Johnson for re-election. He has said repeatedly that he himself would not seek the presidency in 1968. Then, last Wednesday, Kennedy said the strong showing by Sen. Eugene J. McCarthy against Johnson in the New Hampshire primary led him to reassess the situation—a reas-

essment climaxed by his decision to challenge Johnson and McCarthy for the Democratic presidential nomination.

THE CHALLENGE comes eight years after Robert Kennedy managed the campaign of his late brother for the same nomination against a field of other Democrats that included Johnson and his vice president, Hubert H. Humphrey.

The nomination of Johnson for vice president in 1960 and the Democratic victory in the November election united the party. Some bitterness however remained between the Johnson camp and the Kennedys over Robert Kennedy's reported advice to his brother against asking the Texas senator to be his running mate.

JOHNSON MOVED quickly following the assassination of John F. Kennedy Nov. 22, 1963, to assure Robert Kennedy he wanted him to remain as attorney general. However, rumors of coolness between the two began to circulate again within months.

Kennedy said of Johnson: "I have the highest regard for him. He's been kind to me and my family and to Mrs. John F. Kennedy. He is continuing where my brother started."

Six months later, when Kennedy resigned Sept. 3 as attorney general to run for senator from New York, Johnson said he was pleased that "you will soon be back in Washington, where I can again call upon your judgment and counsel."

Kennedy's return to Washington the following January as a senator was followed closely by the big U.S. buildup in Vietnam.

MAY 6, 1965, Kennedy spoke in the Senate on Johnson's request for an additional \$700 million to meet new military commitments, a request Johnson made clear was to be regarded as a vote of confidence.

Kennedy said that while he supported the request "I do so with the understanding . . . it is not a blank check." He said he assumed Johnson would seek approval from Congress for any expansion of the war.

By March, 1966, Kennedy's criticism of administration policy led Sen. Wayne Morse, D-Ore., to say he would back Kennedy for president in 1968 if he "continues to support a change in American Vietnam policy."

Three months later, Kennedy said "I have no plans to run for anything but the Senate in 1970 and I support President Johnson in 1968."

Slowly, his criticism of Vietnam began to spread into other areas.

In August, 1966, he said that despite three years of racial riots in its cities, the United States "as a government" has not "made the kind of commitment necessary to deal with the problems of the ghetto."

BY THE FALL of 1967, the circumstances began to change. Sen. McCarthy, like Kennedy a prime possibility for vice-president in 1964 before Humphrey was chosen, began to talk of running against Johnson, to protest his Vietnam policies.

McCarthy made clear he would step aside if Kennedy decided to run. Kennedy called McCarthy's subsequent candidacy a "healthy influence" but said: "I expect that President Johnson will be the nominee."

Last January 30, Kennedy gathered political reporters for a breakfast at which he expressed grave concern over the course of the country.

THAT WEEK, in Vietnam, the Communists launched their Tet offensive, bringing the war into the cities and increasing expressions of doubt in this country about the course of the war.

Feb. 8, in a speech at Chicago, Kennedy charged Johnson's policy was based on illusions, such as the thought that "the events of the past two weeks represent some sort of victory."

Still, Kennedy kept his ground about not running while McCarthy trudged the snows of New Hampshire, en route to last Tuesday's primary. McCarthy won a startling 42 per cent of the presidential preference vote and 20 of 24 convention delegates.

But when the news of McCarthy's showing came through last Tuesday, however, Kennedy indicated his mind was changing.

BY THE MIDDLE of Wednesday he had announced that the vote showed the party was already split and "I am reassessing my position as to whether I'll run against President Johnson." Later that day he discussed the situation with McCarthy.

McCarthy made clear his earlier offer to withdraw was no longer valid and he said a Kennedy candidacy might divide opponents of the war and help renominate Johnson.